

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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CRITICAL HABITAT SET FORTH FOR FOUR ENDANGERED SPECIES

The critical habitat, or living space animals need to survive, has been officially listed for four endangered species--the American crocodile (Crocodylus acutus), California condor (Gymnogyps californianus), Indiana bat (Myotis sodalis), and Florida manatee (Trichechus manatus).

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a final rulemaking September 21 listing the areas which ought to remain unruined if the species are to have a decent chance to be saved. The rule goes into effect October 22. It is by no means a guarantee that man will be prevented from destroying them.

Critical habitat for these four species, as well as for the snail darter (Percina tanasi) and the whooping crane (Grus americana), was proposed on December 16, 1975. A final rulemaking designating critical habitat for the snail darter was issued on April 1, 1976. As for the whooping crane, so much information was received in response to the December 16 proposal that more time will be required for evaluation.

This determination is being made in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 which requires all Federal agencies to ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by them do not adversely affect the critical habitat of endangered and threatened species. The specific delineations of critical habitat in this rulemaking will assist Federal agencies in knowing the areas where their responsibilities may apply. The designations, however, are not comparable to establishment of wilderness areas or wildlife refuges. No legal jurisdiction is assumed, and no prohibition of particular activity is made. The only specific effect of the rulemaking is that Federal agencies will have to evaluate their actions with regard to the requirements of Section 7. The Fish and Wildlife Service emphasizes that the determinations apply only to Federal agencies and only to their actions that may adversely affect the species involved. It is thought that many kinds of actions in the designated areas would not be detrimental.

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The critical habitat being designated for the American crocodile covers the area inhabited by nearly all of these huge reptiles that survive in the United States. The area is located in extreme southern Florida, mostly in Everglades National Park and the northern Florida Keys. The 200 to 300 crocodiles here are dependent upon the waters of Florida Bay and the associated marshes, swamps, creeks, and canals. All known breeding females, of which there are less than 10 in Florida, inhabit and nest in the delineated area.

The California condor, of which only about 60 survive, is among the two or three most critically endangered birds in the United States. Ten separate parts of its remaining range in southern California are being recognized as critical habitat. The largest of these, the Sespe-Piru Condor Area in the Los Padres National Forest, covers about 250 square miles of territory used by the species for nesting and related year-round activity. Six smaller blocks of land, totaling about 135 square miles, also are mainly in the Los Padres National Forest, and are utilized for nesting or roosting. Three larger areas, covering about 540 square miles, are located on rangelands to the north, and are where the condor searches for the carrion on which it feeds.

The Indiana bat, though numbering several hundred thousand, is endangered because it is losing the relatively few special kinds of caves in which it concentrates during the winter. Thirteen of these caves, located in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and West Virginia, are being designated as critical habitat. It is anticipated that additional caves, and possibly other parts of the habitat of the bat, will also be designated in the near future.

There are 600 to 1,000 manatees in the United States with the major concentrations being in Florida. Certain water areas are now known to be of particular importance, and these are being designated critical habitat. They include the Crystal River in Citrus County; portions of the Little Manatee, Manatee, Myakka, Peace, and Caloosahatchee Rivers and Charlotte Harbor in west-central Florida; waters along the coasts of Lee, Collier, and Monroe Counties; sounds along the southern tip of Florida; Biscayne Bay and adjoining waterways near Miami; Lake Worth, and the Loxahatchee, Indian, and Banana Rivers, and portions of the Intracoastal Waterway along the east coast; and the St. Johns River.

Biologists who set out to determine what constitutes a critical habitat use these guidelines:

- (1) space for normal growth, movements, or territorial behavior;
- (2) nutritional requirements, such as food, water, minerals;
- (3) sites for breeding, reproduction, or rearing of offspring;
- (4) cover or shelter; or
- (5) other biological, physical, or behavioral requirements.

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